

Aintree
Head & Neck
Practice
Development
Unit

Epistaxis (Nose Bleed)

Aintree University Hospital **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

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What is Epistaxis?

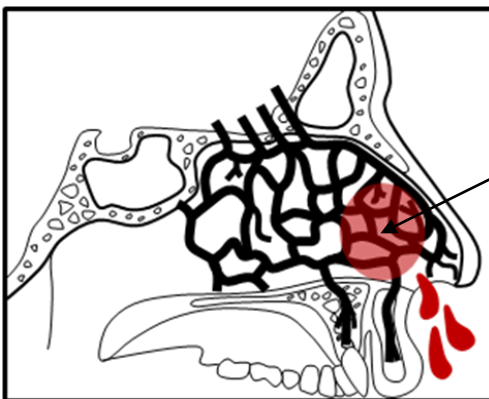
- Epistaxis (also called nose bleeds) are very common (especially in the elderly and young children)
- Most nosebleeds are harmless and do not require treatment
- Nosebleeds usually happen when a small blood vessel inside the nose lining bursts and bleeds.

The lining of the nose has lots of tiny blood vessels, which warm the air as it enters the nose. This lining is very fragile and may break easily, causing bleeding

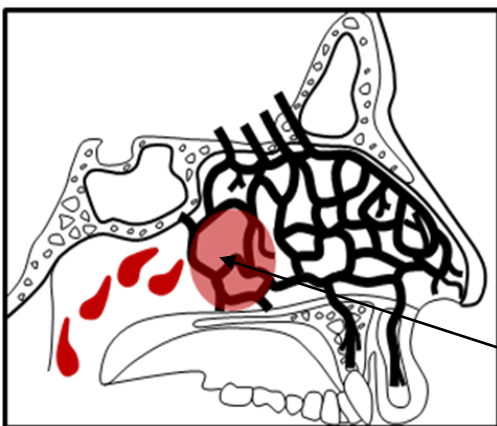
What causes a nosebleed?

A range of factors can aggravate a nosebleed. The most common factors include:-

- Fragile blood vessels that bleed easily, mostly in warm to hot, dry weather
- High blood pressure
- High alcohol intake
- An infection of the lining of the nostrils, sinuses or adenoids
- Colds, flu, allergy or hay fever
- Bumps or falls
- An object pushed up the nostril
- Nose-picking
- Constipation causing straining
- Medications such as **warfarin**, **aspirin**, **clopidogrel** (also known as 'blood thinners') and anti-inflammatory tablets
- A bleeding or clotting disorder (this is rare).



Bleeding from the front of the nose



Bleeding from the back of the nose

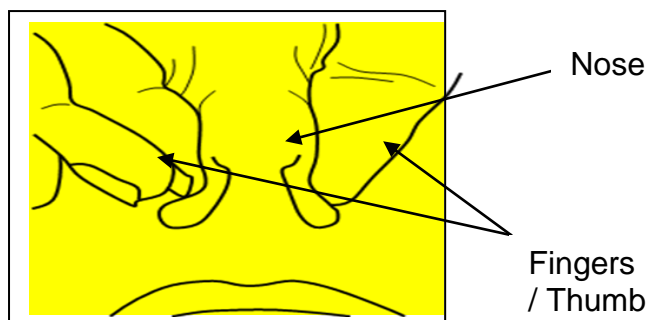
First aid

You can stop nearly all nosebleeds yourself at home. Follow these simple first aid steps.

- Stay calm. Crying will make the bleeding worse
- Sit upright and bend forward slightly. Use the thumb and forefinger to pinch the nose.

Squeeze firmly over the soft part of the nose just above the nostrils (See overleaf)

- Hold for over 10 minutes and then release the grip slowly. If the bleeding is profuse and continues for more than 15 minutes, seek urgent medical attention



- Do not keep checking whether the bleeding has stopped because the blood needs time to clot
- Do not blow your nose once the bleeding has stopped otherwise it may bleed again
- Breathe through your mouth while the nostrils are pinched
- Spit out any blood that comes into your mouth. Do not swallow the blood
- It may help to put a cold pack or cold cloth over your forehead or the bridge of the nose

Treatment

Whilst in hospital, the doctor will attempt to find the site of the bleeding and treat it. For severe nosebleeds, you may have a blood test to estimate how much blood you have lost.

There are a number of ways to stop the bleeding:-

1. Applying ice and pressure to the soft part of the nose (see above)
2. **Cautery** (a tool which 'burns' or 'freezes' the blood vessels) to seal the blood vessels so they no longer break open.

This is usually done with a local anaesthetic into the nose and is not usually painful

3. Packing your nose with a pack or a special dressing. If your nose is 'packed', the dressing may need to remain in place for several days. Do not remove it yourself

With packing you may be prescribed antibiotics to prevent a bacterial infection

If nasal packing is not needed, your doctor may advise you to apply an antibiotic ointment inside the nose



4. Surgery. This is usually a last resort and will only be an option if all of the above have been attempted first.

Surgery

There are different operations your doctor may want to carry out. The details of which can be complicated therefore you should always discuss your options at length before consenting to surgery.

1. **Diathermy** – a very successful treatment for nosebleeds is to pass a very weak electric current across the blood vessel.

This treatment is performed by ENT doctors using a small telescope inside the nose.

The telescope allows the doctor to find the blood vessel that is bleeding and then use diathermy to stop the bleeding.

2. **Sphenopalatine Artery Ligation** - this involves 'sealing off' the main blood vessel in the nose. This blood vessel is located behind your cheek.

This operation also uses telescopes and does not usually involve making any cuts in the skin around the nose.

- 3. Embolisation** - if the operations detailed above are not successful then your doctor may recommend a procedure called 'embolisation'.

This involves passing small 'guidewires' along a blood vessel from your leg up into your nose.

Radiology doctors perform this procedure and use various materials (such as fine mesh or glue) to 'seal off' blood vessels 'from the inside'.

This procedure is relatively complicated and your doctor would explain it in more detail before recommending this treatment.

Discharge Advice

- Rest quietly for the next 24-48 hours
- Avoid hot liquids and hot /spicy food for at least 24-48 hours after a nosebleed
- Do not pick your nose
- Do not blow your nose for 24-48 hours
- Avoid strenuous exercise, straining or lifting heavy items for seven days.
- If you have constipation, ask your doctor or pharmacist for medication to prevent straining.
- Some people with dry skin in the nose may find ointment (such as **Vaseline**) or nasal sprays may help. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

The Future

- Most nosebleeds cause only minor discomfort
- Some people may have several nosebleeds over a period of a few weeks

- In the elderly, the bleeding can come from the back of the nose. This can be serious
- Sometimes the bleeding is due to an underlying bleeding problem although this is rare
- Rarely do people lose so much blood that it causes anaemia (a serious reduction in the number of red blood cells).

If this happens, you may need to go on iron tablets (and in rare cases need a blood transfusion).

Prevention

- If the bleeding happens often, ask your GP to check for any underlying problem
- You may need **cautery** to stop the nose bleeds for good. This only works if one blood vessel is involved. If there are more, then the bleeding is likely to come back
- If an ongoing infection is the cause of your nosebleeds, your doctor may advise an antibiotic ointment or tablet
- If you have high blood pressure, it is sensible to get it checked regularly (especially if you are having repeated nose bleeds)
- **Do not** stop taking medications such as aspirin / Warfarin unless advised to do so by a doctor.

Other measures that may help prevent nosebleeds include:

- using a humidifier
- drinking plenty of fluids
- using an ointment on the affected area (such as **Vaseline**)
- using a saline nasal spray
- using headgear when playing sports
- avoiding cigarette smoke

Further information:

Ward 29

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Ward 28

Tel No: 0151 529 5238 / 0151 529 5239

NHS Direct

Tel No: 0845 4647

This leaflet is based on information sited on the following websites.

NHS Choices website

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Nosebleed/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

ENT UK website

https://entuk.org/docs/patient_info_leaflets/09021_nosebleeds



If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on audio tape or disk and in other languages on request. Please contact:

Tel No: 0151 529 0320

Email: interpretationandtranslation@aintree.nhs.uk